

22 June, 2020

Dear President Book:

Like millions around the country and the world, Elon University students and alumni are outraged by the police brutality and systemic racism that plagues the United States. Thousands of protestors continue to flood the streets. We've seen Elon, without specificity, acknowledge these injustices, and we are underwhelmed by the university's public response to these demonstrations.

First, in your May 31 message titled, "A Message from President Connie Ledoux Book," it was disheartening to see not a single mention of police brutality against the black community — the main issue that people are protesting all over the country. Not addressing the issue directly is singularly concerning, but it comes across as especially hypocritical because Elon University houses its own police department, which is drastically different from a town, city or county's law enforcement offices.

Most police departments are comprised of civil servants and they are supposed to release a variety of publicly-available data and statistics about themselves allowing community citizens to hold them accountable. Thanks to this data being available citizens are able to better understand what's happening with their police departments and discern any and all trends. For example: according to the nonprofit Mapping Police Violence, in 2019, 24% of people killed by police officers in the United States were Black, despite Black people only making up 13% of the United States population.

Second, because Elon University is a private institution, the school's police department can operate with minimal public records. In fact, in 2012 the university fought its own student at the time, Nick Oschner, in a lawsuit about the lack of available records from the school's police department. And while the university won in that case, that lawsuit was the catalyst for a North Carolina bill that was signed into law in 2013, requiring private school police departments to disclose more information on their reports than was previously available.

Most importantly, currently the university police department only files 2 annual reports, a Fire & Safety Report and an Internal Affairs Report, neither specifies and/or publishes relevant details about the complaints filed against individual officers or the department as a whole. There is no demographic data made publicly available by the department as to who these officers are arresting, and for what crimes they are arresting them. The 2019 IA report only cites 6 internal investigations conducted; categorizing them under bland terminology without definitional explanations, and without the actual incident police reports referenced or published. This is unacceptable. Without explicit public data, it is impossible to hold the university's own police officers accountable, and it is impossible for the university to address the very same issues being protested right now.

Perhaps the Elon University Campus Police do not arrest more Black people on a percentage basis than there are Black people on campus. Perhaps EUPD is an exemplary unit when it comes to implicit bias training and in their treatment of the community. Fundamentally, we as a community do not know whether or not these things are true because EUPD is allowed to operate

without transparency, and the fact that Elon has fought to keep EUPD from being held to the same public record standards as other police departments does not inspire faith in the community, either.

But, you can help bring change to the Elon community, President Book. You already personally committed to “reviewing our university policies and practices” in your May 31 message. You have the ability to make the Elon University Campus Police more transparent in their actions. You can have EUPD be a national model for all higher education institutions who have private police forces. You can show that you understand how the policing system in the United States has discriminated against people of color and that you want to help fix it.

We look forward to your response. Long Live Elon.

Respectfully,

Zachary Bocian '17 Alex Simon '17 Thomas Fazio '17 Eliza Sanders '21 Leena Dahal '17 Blair King '22 Jesse Allison '17 McKenzie Miller '21 Jack Morrill '23 Maren Sherrill '17 Jerry Quinton Staples '11 Mackenzie Lindland '17 Lumiere Rostick '20 Katie Perry '17 Nicole Roberts '20 Morgan Abate '16 Alex Giglio '18 Maddy Starr '23 Toni Parker '22 Erin Smith '22 Carly Keane '21 Samantha Hess '22 Renell Taylor '23 Peter Walpole '15 Lucy Jones '20 Josie Reed '18 Madeleine Stokowski '15 Clare Shaffer '18 Tiana Binns '21